

Administrator's Mission to Greater China

Beijing Scene-Setter December 9 and 10, 2013

The Setting

Beijing has existed as the capital of the modern-day People's Republic of China since the PRC's establishment in 1949. The city's history is nearly 3,000 years old and has served as the political center of the country for much of the past eight centuries. In 1981, Beijing's urban area began expanding greatly with the completion of the 2nd Ring Road where the old city walls used to lie. A 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th Ring Road have since been added for a city with a population of over 20,000,000 people. In 1953 the population was 2.7M. Urbanization on this grand scale has led to commensurate environmental challenges, especially poor urban air quality. It is not only coal burning power plants, cars, and factories from Beijing polluting the air. Prevailing winds bring a great deal of pollution from surrounding cities and provinces.

China and Beijing have taken several measures to curb air pollution, many implemented and held over from the city's hosting of the 2008 Summer Olympics, with measures of success. However, as the economy has continued to grow, the city routinely faces incidences of bad air days with severe smog. The U.S. Embassy, which keeps an air quality monitor on site, reported air pollution beyond measurable levels in 2011, much higher numbers than the government was reporting and the Embassy began making these numbers public. Episodes of days with extremely high levels of PM 2.5, popularly known as "airpocalypse," continue to plague Beijing and other Chinese cities, particularly in the drier winter months.



[Exemption 5]

EPA's 33 year relationship with China is formalized through its Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Environmental Protection. You are specifically in China and in Beijing to co-chair the Joint Committee on Environmental Cooperation (JCEC), the minister level biennial program review and forum for setting strategic direction for the next two years of cooperation. This is the fourth time that the JCEC has met. The previous JCEC meetings were in 2005 in Washington, DC, 2007 in China, and 2010 in Washington DC. You will also meet privately with MEP Minister Zhou Shengxian and be received at a formal banquet by EPA's MEP hosts.

A program of other engagements in Beijing is also scheduled to showcase and further EPA's collaboration in China and USG foreign interests.

You will open a fuel desulfurization workshop that is being jointly sponsored by the China Vehicle Emissions Control Center (a research arm of MEP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). UNEP has received funding from an EPA grant for this workshop. You will also visit the Beijing air monitoring center, administered by Beijing's provincial environment agency, to highlight their monitoring and reporting efforts to improve air quality.

The powerful National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) is the ministry in China with the primary authority for addressing climate change. A planned visit Vice Chairman Xia will help establish EPA's position as the primary U.S. authority leading domestic climate actions in the United States with NDRC. It will also advance EPA's contribution to the U.S.- China Climate Working Group under the Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED).

Your major address to the Chinese public will be done at Tsinghua University via a speech to their School of Environment Community. Here you will deliver a major speech with climate change as the primary topic. Foreign press will be invited to cover the speech, a major part of the public engagement/press strategy for your visit. Your speech will be taped for follow-up events at other U.S. Consulate events through China. A planned accompanying op-ed and other interview and press opportunities will complement the public engagement strategy.



[Exemption 5]

Key Theme and Messages

- The EPA relationship with China spans 30+ years and partnership is stronger than ever.
- EPA will continue to collaborate with our colleagues at the Ministry of Environmental Protection to build capacity and face common challenges.
- The U.S. and China are economic competitors and partners in finding solutions for environmental challenges. The world depends on us and looks to us for leadership and solutions.
- A changing climate doesn't recognize borders.
- Access to environmental data and transparency is a vital tool in environmental protection and has led to positive policy changes for monitoring air quality, enforcing laws, and fighting pollution in Beijing.